

Silently Screaming

Story: Silently Screaming

Storylink: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/2055170/1/>

Category: Golden Sun

Genre: Horror

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Authorlink: <https://www.fanfiction.net/u/456916/>

Last updated: 09/13/2004

Words: 703

Rating: K+

Status: Complete

Content: Chapter 1 to 1 of 1 chapters

Source: FanFiction.net

Summary: For Akiko's fic challenge There are times when even the sea will go silent.

***Chapter 1*: Silently Screaming**

He panted, the sounds of his breathing heavy in his ears. It had been just one battle after another ever since they had crossed into the Great Western Sea. And the monsters were stronger.

"Picard! Behind you!"

The Lemurian turned at the Venus Adept's yell, but he did so too slowly. Before he could even recognize the type of monster, something connected with the side of his head in an attempt to rip his consciousness away. Sprawled on the deck of his ship, Picard surrendered it.

Waking up was an odd experience. As Picard sat up, rubbing his bandaged head and biting back a few choice words he'd learned from Felix, he felt something was missing. He was on his ship; he knew that much from the gentle rocking. He could sense his friends and the Djinn. What then? What was he missing? He had the feeling it was something he was very familiar with, something he took for granted to the extent that he no longer noticed it.

Gently, he swung his feet out of bed and slowly stood, feeling a bit dizzy. How long had he been lying there? His head still hurt; that had been quite a blow!

Once he was fairly sure of his balance, he made his way to the door. Was it night? He didn't hear any of the others up. It wouldn't be good to wake them if that were so. Picard softly closed the door, succeeding in not making a sound.

Moving as quietly as he could, he made for the cabin. If someone was up, that's where they'd be. And someone *had*

to be up; it may have taken them a while to get one they could all agree on, but they did have a watch system.

But really, it was amazing how quiet a person could be when they went barefoot on boards that didn't creak.

Completely quiet.

Deathly quiet.

A thought came to him and he broke into a run, his feet hitting the floor soundlessly. His breathing became shallow but stayed silent as he prayed to be wrong. Terror following at his heels, he burst into the cabin, sprinted up the stairs and past his friends before they could say a word. Picard opened the door and dashed out to the side of his ship.

Panting, the smell of salt filled his nose, as it always did.

Standing still, the rocking of the ship became noticeable to him, as it always did.

But the sound of the waves . . . was gone. Not quiet. Gone.

He stared out at the sea, his breath quickening and his dread building with each passing moment. A hand waved in front of his face and he turned to see Jenna. He hadn't heard her approach. Or Felix's, Sheba's and Kraden's. The sage's mouth moved.

No sound came out.

Picard turned away, his eyes widening as his terror redoubled. This couldn't be happening to him. It just couldn't. It couldn't be! He couldn't be-

He took a breath and screamed. And screamed. And screamed. As his throat began to ache, he saw Jenna clap her hands over her ears and Kraden wince before doing the same.

Picard felt no such need.

He took a deep, ragged breath and continued his screaming, yelling his fear into the world and across the waves. If he were loud enough . . . if he were loud enough, he'd hear it. He would. Then it wouldn't be so quiet, so deathly silent. He'd hear it; he would. He had to.

The Lemurian felt Felix tug at his sleeve and saw the other's lips move. Picard's panic grew further and his throat grew raw. He watched as the realization dawned on all four of his companions.

He couldn't hear it. Not his screaming. Not the words of his concerned friends. Not even the permanent sound of the waves. He couldn't hear any of it.

He'd gone deaf.